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‘Write Your Life!’ British Prisoners of War in the Korean War (1950–1953) and Enforced Life Narratives

Abstract: This article explores the range of life writing produced by British prisoners of war during the Korean War (1950–3). By examining enforced diary -keeping, public confessions and self-criticism within prisoner of war camps ran by the Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV), this article uses the example of British servicemen to demonstrate how British prisoners of war were constantly called upon to reflexively consider their role as servicemen and their reasons for being in Korea. Such self-reflection was even called for upon their return home when prisoners were interrogated by British authorities. Through examining the context and form of these under-used life narratives, this article suggests that the concept of ‘enforced narrative’ has a wide utility for theorists of life writing and calls for a reappraisal of individual volition within autobiographical writing.

Keywords: prisoner; diary; confession; psychoanalysis

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‘Write Your Life!’ British Prisoners of War in the Korean War (1950–1953) and Enforced Life Narratives

In September 1953 Lieutenant Colonel James Power Carne of the Gloucestershire Regiment, the most senior British officer captured during the Korean War (1950–1953), returned to great crowds welcoming prisoners of war back home. There was a fair amount of public interest in Carne’s experiences: 1,067 British servicemen, serving as part of the United Nations (UN) force on the Korean peninsula, had been taken prisoner by North Korean and Chinese forces (Farrar-Hockley, 486). Carne himself was singled out by the Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV) for special interrogation. One of the few things Carne said to the assembled journalists at Southampton Docks that day was he had ‘gained a great pride in being British and ... [had] lost a little weight’ (Carne). Perhaps due to the expectations of public decorum, the prevalence of understatement amongst the generation who fought in the Second World War or simply due to personal reserve, Carne refused to tell his story of imprisonment to the press.

However, despite Carne’s reticence, British prisoners of war in Korea were some of the most prolific life-writers, or life-tellers, in modern conflict. Servicemen produced countless life narratives during one or two years they spent in prisoner of war camps, from interrogation responses to enforced diary writing and public confessions. Prisoners were repeatedly asked why they were in Korea in the first place, a question many struggled to answer. Britain was one of twenty-four nations which offered support to the US-led UN force when North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) crossed the 38th Parallel into the Republic of Korea (ROK) on 25 June 1950. Historians have suggested Prime Minister Clement Attlee committed British forces either to ensure continued US aid to post-war Europe or to soften potentially insensitive US policy towards the People’s Republic of China (Macdonald, 27–28; Greenwood, 1–5). Despite this, China still sent troops to the peninsula in late 1950 to support North Korea and pushed back the initial UN advance. During the first year of the conflict troops moved continually up and down the peninsula and thousands of UN servicemen were taken prisoner. Prisoners were then marched northwards to a network of prisoner of war camps along the Yalu River in North Korea, ran by the CPV. Historians have until now focused primarily on the political education prisoner received in these camps. Life narratives, however, were a central part of prison life.

The emphasis the CPV placed on accounting for one’s life emanated from Chinese military system, which had, since the nineteenth century, used diary-writing as a discursive and regulatory practice to instil discipline (Moore, 2007). Public self-criticism is frequently identified as a uniquely ‘Communist’ practice, associated with the show trials of the early Soviet Union (Hellbeck, 2). However, forcing life stories from soldiers was not simply the preserve of Communist nations. In Britain, for instance, soldiers’ life stories were frequently *extracted* by military authorities and were used for many purposes. In the mid-twentieth century, potential soldiers were forced to tell their life

story as part of their recruitment, either in a questionnaire or to a military psychiatrist, and when many later returned to Britain as prisoners of war they were interrogated by their own military authorities for details of their lives behind bars. This article suggests that the ‘enforced narrative’, a first term used by historian Carolyn Steedman, was a central part of both military and prison life. Servicemen and prisoners of war were forced to tell their lives by both friend and foe alike.

More generally, by using the case study of prisoners of war in Korea, this article seeks to demonstrate the involuntary nature of much military life telling and to unsettle assumptions about the agency of self-narration. It first explores historical, literary and psychological genealogy of the ‘enforced narrative’ and the theoretical issues it raises for life-writing theorists. This article then examines in detail the forms of life narrative produced in captivity, highlighting the importance of *non-Western* conceptualisations of imprisonment in understanding prisoner of war narratives. Following the work of prison writing theorists including Daniel Roux and Paul Gready, it also considers the importance of time to the enforced life narrative. The term life narrative, rather than life writing, is used to reiterate the non-written form of much of this self-reflection (Smith and Watson, 4). This piece concludes by reaffirming that enforced narratives were widely used in the mid-twentieth-century military and perhaps even in broader society. Yet although this article suggests throughout that self-narration can be a form of state interpellation (whether Chinese or British), it nevertheless seeks to highlight instances of subversion or resistance: like Colonel Carne, many servicemen *refused* to tell their lives or used their enforced narratives to other ends. This small case study thus suggests that the enforced narrative challenges all theorists of life writing to address both their definition of authorial agency and the evidence that can be used to analyse selfhood.

Enforced Narratives

Voluntary autobiography is an implicit assumption in much scholarship on wartime life writing. Samuel Hynes writes that the ‘soldier’s tale’ is one of gradual disillusionment, from the initial euphoria of enlistment to the moment of bitter epiphany in the carnage of battle (16–17). The soldier feels compelled to write to report or reflect upon his experience and the change it has wrought in him. Yuval Noah Harari argues that the ‘quintessential later modern Western war story’ involves learning the truth about the world and oneself, citing Ernst Jünger’s *Storm of Steel* (1924) as the typical story of ‘epiphany’ (1–4). Some of the most canonical autobiographical works written in modern conflict seemingly corroborate this assessment. From the works of Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves to war memoirs from Iraq and Afghanistan, life writing is characterised by the idea of personal motivation, whether to debunk glorious tales of war or to profit from the public appetite for tales of danger and violence. Collections of life writing written by ‘ordinary’ soldiers –which Hope Wolff calls a ‘frustratingly vague term, with resonances of the “non-professional writer”, “limited education”’ (328) – are also frequently framed as purely voluntary texts. Max Arthur describes

himself as the ‘catalyst’ in bringing long dead voices to life in *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War* (x) and Richard Van Emden notes that the ‘last fighting Tommy’, Harry Patch, ‘clearly wanted to tell his story’ (6).

However, Carolyn Steedman argues that at the other end of the ‘life-telling’ spectrum narratives were frequently *extracted*. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bastardy examinations, court appearances or the forced testimonies of ‘subaltern’ subjects all extracted a form of life narrative, even from the illiterate. The self in these cases was not revealed through self-introspection and writing: rather it was ‘a thing that could be fashioned according to requirement, told and sold, alienated and expropriated’ (‘Enforced Narratives’, 36). Dana Rabin notes how this self was often defensively constructed, with defendants keen to distance themselves from their crime and to re-identify with normal, upstanding citizens (89). The self was therefore not a dormant, stable entity waiting to be uncovered by a careful process of excavation. It was instead created in moments of plaintive interrogation and cross-examination and was often far detached from the process of writing. Steedman argues that life narratives were demanded elsewhere too: for instance, twentieth-century schoolchildren were asked to write their ‘autobiographies’ or those of inanimate objects (‘State-Sponsored Autobiography’, 41–54), a practice used in primary education for decades. Seemingly, the enforced narrative has had a prominent place in the history of state institutions, from the courthouse to the schoolroom.

Other examples of enforced narrative from the realm of fiction further question individual volition in life writing. Danish author Karen Blixen’s short story ‘The Blank Page’ (1957) powerfully recalls the common early modern practice of displaying marital bed sheets after the first night of marital co-habitation (Blixen, 105; Margairaz, 201–2). Sidonie Smith argues that these ‘blank’ spaces were essential for women’s voices to be heard as the ‘scriptocentric’, male-centred practice of ‘autobiography’ or memoir-writing so often curtailed female opportunities to speak (Smith 2–3; Zabus, 165). Alternatively, the blood-soaked sheets represented an involuntary testimony to a key life event and were primarily defensive, like a court testimony. The virginal bride was forced to testify her purity in order to sanction her marriage and position herself within societal norms. The broader function of this ‘narrative’, to legitimise a union, also demonstrates that the self was once again ‘fashioned according to requirement’ (Steedman, ‘Enforced Narratives’, 36). Whilst this article primarily concerns the narratives of men, Blixen’s story remains a useful tool to understand enforced life narratives as both written and non-written. Furthermore, it underscores the way in which those forced to produce a narrative could attach a purpose to such stories, whether to defend, exonerate or realign themselves with a social order.

Steedman’s concept of the enforced narrative is also highly applicable to areas more intimately connected with war writing, such as the study of ‘trauma’. Susannah Radstone argues that the historical and literary interest in trauma and silence in narrative reflects both the growing neurological understanding of memory and the academic rise of ‘deconstruction’ since the 1990s (9–

10). War trauma is by definition unspoken and elusive. Jenny Edkins evokes Sigmund Freud when she writes that: ‘There is no language for it [trauma]. Abuse by the state, the fatherland, like abuse by the father within the family, cannot be spoken in language, since language comes from and belongs to the family and community’ (7). Nigel Hunt, taking a more anti-Freudian stance by focusing on adult rather than childhood trauma, argues that trauma causes a loss of coherence, as people cannot integrate their traumatic experiences into their conception of themselves or wider trajectory of their lives and society (126). Witnessing to war therefore can be inhibited by an inability to speak, caused by a variety of reasons. Literary scholar Kate McLoughlin explores the ‘dizzying variety’ of literary techniques employed by wartime authors in ‘the project of *not* telling’ (47–8) and Hunt too explores how many soldiers remain silent about their experiences as a strategy of ‘avoidance’, as they have to continue to live in the environment where the traumatic event occurred (149). People may also remain silent because they cannot frame their experiences in terms that others will understand. Implicitly echoing postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak’s conceptualisation of how the subaltern ‘speaks’, historian Aaron Moore notes that after conflict ‘servicemen [had] to learn to speak in a way that they could be understood; in other words, they would have to narrate the war by using the language of those who experienced the war at home (or remain silent)’ (Spivak; Moore 2013, 244). Richard Badenhause highlights an example of this: he argues that author Vera Brittain initially embarked on writing her memoir of the First World War, *Testament of Youth* (1933), to address her wartime trauma. Like the eulogised canon of First World War poet-memoirists, she tried to use her memoirs to “‘get outside it all’”, but as a woman she ultimately found the combat-focused model of a ‘trauma memoir’ restrictive (442). Post-war societies prescribe the way experiences must be told and implicitly silence stories that do not fit this mould.

Yet trauma and the inability to produce a coherent life story demonstrate the utility of the enforced narrative. From at least the early twentieth century, military institutions used the enforced narrative as a *practical method* of overcoming gaps and silences, when life stories were left purposefully unspoken. Psychoanalysis, for instance, although regarded with immense suspicion by British authorities during the First World War, had become an important part of British military psychology by the Second World War, even if the technique of lengthy analysis was never widely used (Stonebridge, 1–2). By 1945, the ideas of psychoanalysts Wilfred Bion (1897–1979), Tom Main (1911–1990) and John Rickman (1891–1951) underpinned recruitment practices in the British Army. New procedures tested individual aptitudes through practical tests and included a psychiatric interview for candidates. Enforced life narratives were an explicit part of this selection, particularly with officer selection from 1941, where candidates had to provide a life history in an interview with senior officers and a psychiatrist (who constituted the War Office Selection Board) and a ‘self-description’. Life histories were introduced to gain information on each candidate’s ‘emotional maturity’, ‘temperamental stability’ and ‘military qualities’. Questions ranged from the fairly simple enquiry about family background to asking candidates how they felt they reacted around other people,

their assertiveness and their scrupulousness. Answers helped interviewers to place them into four different ‘personality’ groups. The recruitment questionnaire was another enforced narrative, where candidates were given one hour to write about themselves (United Kingdom, War Office, ‘WOSBs’). Both the rise of this generation of eminent psychoanalysts and the centrality of the life narrative to their approaches ensured that the enforced life story was a central part of the military before servicemen even reached Korea.

On a more theoretical level, we might consider the psychoanalytic model itself to be a form of enforced narrative. Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaffer argue that ‘psychoanalytic frameworks of interiority’ establish a ‘form of remembering [which] presumes and prescribes a particular kind of storytelling about the past’ that fits neatly into a circumscribed model of trauma, regardless of gender, racial and ethnic differences (7–9). Is the enforced narrative therefore somehow ‘inauthentic’? Juliet Mitchell writes that psychoanalytic techniques do not prompt the subject to uncover his/her ‘self’, but instead calls on them to ‘make a new history’ in *dialogue* with an interlocutor (288). However, this is the case for *all* life narratives. Adriana Cavarero, interpreting the storytelling practices of Italian feminists, argues that the ‘narratable’ self is always made in relation to others (and agrees with Hannah Arendt that the self is always political in this sense) (Cavarero, x). As Kay Souter summarises, the ‘presence of another mind for psychic survival’ is essential (795). In Freud’s schema, the self simply does not exist outside of the life story told to another person. As Mitchell writes, ‘the story is the whole truth and nothing but the truth – the story is all’ (311). In these assessments, both the life story and the self are not pre-existent entities: rather they are revealed through a specific practice of extraction (Steedman, ‘Enforced Narratives’, 27; Charles Taylor, 289). To assume that the extracted life story produced under coercion is somehow less genuine both fails to acknowledge the plethora of external factors which induce people to tell their life story and fundamentally misinterprets the relationship between the life narrative and selfhood. It is dangerous to presume that *any* life story is the unadulterated and voluntary articulation of selfhood, as all narratives are produced, to some extent, in response to others’ demands and in terms others can access.

This is not to minimise the agency of individuals in producing life narratives. Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer Pierce and Barbara Lasslett note that ‘personal narrative analyses not only reveal the dynamics of agency in practice, but also can document its construction through culturally embedded narrative forms that, over an individual’s life, impose their own logics and thus also shape both life stories and lives’ (2). As a result, it is perhaps more fruitful to analyse life writing within a spectrum of compulsion and coercion; individual desire and cultural demands. Consequently, much of this essay focuses on instances of subversion and resistance to the enforced narrative. Nevertheless, the enforced narrative has been widely used across time and space and it might helpfully be applied to further historical and contemporary settings in order to raise further questions about agency and selfhood in life writing. The case study of British prisoners of war forms a powerful example of the use of the enforced narrative, although it cannot alone answer this question definitively.

As Paul Gready notes, ‘to be a prisoner is to be variously written’ (493). Whilst tales the lone male prisoner writing in captivity undoubtedly are of long-standing precedent within Western literature, from John Bunyan to Oscar Wilde, critical attention toward the modern prison as an institution accelerated in the second half of the twentieth century. The compilation of Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* between 1948 and 1951 made the historical discipline acutely aware of writing that could take place within prison walls, as did the publication of Marc Bloch’s *The Historian’s Craft* (1954) which had been written ‘amid sorrows and anxieties personal and collective’ in Occupied France in 1941 (Gramsci; Bloch, xix). Thus, even as Korean War was still raging, academic disciplines were beginning to consider the writing of the prisoner. From the 1970s British and American critics began to examine the literary attributes of prison narratives (Parker; Ball; Franklin; Harlow). Writing produced by political prisoners under the Apartheid regime in South Africa has been especially significant. Gready argues that South African prison authorities used methods such as interrogation to violently destroy the prisoner’s own life story and sense of self. Subsequently any material produced by prisoners, from graffiti on prison walls to later autobiographical accounts, was an attempt to regain ‘control’ in response to this violence towards their life narrative (492). Gready’s interpretation testifies to the enduring importance of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* to the study of captivity. Foucault’s genealogy traces modern disciplinary methods from the gruesome punishment of regicide in 1757 to Bentham’s all-seeing prison design of the ‘Panopticon’ and to the Western prison system in the 1970s (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*). Whilst Foucault’s critics have questioned his chronology and use of source material (Gibson, 1040), his terminology has had a profound and pervasive impact, not least on studies of captivity.

However, Foucault’s paradigm of penitentiary power is limited when interpreting prisoner of war life narratives, especially in the Korean War. In contrast to the popular perception of the prison camp, few in Korea were surrounded by barbed wire or panoptical surveillance platforms; camps were often abandoned villages or buildings and their remoteness and the inability of the prisoners to assimilate easily into the local population made wire largely unnecessary (Carter, 41). Furthermore, as Daniel Branch notes in his study of prisons in colonial Kenya, Foucault’s model is highly specific to Western Europe and overlooks non-Western conceptions of captivity. Branch argues that ‘confinement is a culturally specific hallmark’ of a free society and that the Kenyan prison was a place of punishment, not a panopticon (261). As C. Fred Alford notes, ‘an American prison is the only prison Foucault ever visited’ and the panopticon does not reflect the day-to-day running of most prisons around the world (126). Frank Dikötter states that whilst the prison has been a suitably ‘multivalent’ concept with a universal meaning, it has also had a specific meaning within given contexts. For example, in the early twentieth century Chinese authorities conceived the prison as an educative project, but with the advent of the Communist regime in 1949 any ameliorative structures

broke down, largely due to an increase in the number of political prisoners. Prison guards lacked training and the prison became a tool of political power rather than an institution of improvement (6 and 364–68). As the Chinese army – the CPV – ran the majority of camps in Korea from 1951, these alternate understandings of captivity must thus inform any study of prisoner of war life narratives.

Writing in Captivity

The British Army in Korea were a mix of army regulars, young National Service conscripts, reservists from the Second World War and ‘K-Force’ volunteers. This meant that prisoners of war taken during the conflict had differing levels of military experience. Twenty five Royal Marines (of whom sixteen survived) were taken in November 1950 at Chosin and then eighty men were taken in the first Chinese Offensive in January 1951. A further 527 officers and men from the Gloucester Regiment were taken at Imjin River in April 1951 and small numbers of others were taken in minor engagements in November 1951 (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, Advisory Panel Report, 29). The majority of British prisoners were therefore held for over a year until the cessation of hostilities in July 1953. Prisoners of many nationalities (including American, British and Turkish troops) were initially held by the NKPA, but early in 1951 the CPV assumed responsibility for all prisoners.

Upon capture the majority of prisoners were marched four hundred miles north on the ‘Long March’ to the camps and many testify the harshness of conditions, small amounts of food and poor provision for the wounded (Maguire, 5; Carter, 40). Some prisoners were not taken directly to camps along the Yalu River, but were instead taken to camps near Pyongyang, including ‘Bean Camp’ (the name deriving from its monotonous menu) and notorious camps including ‘The Caves’ and ‘Pak’s Death House’. These camps were poorly equipped and many died here from wounds or malnutrition. In addition, guards at ‘Pak’s Death House’ (run by camp commandant Major Pak of the NKPA) used violent interrogatory methods on prisoners (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, *Treatment*, 38–41). Much of the information on these camps derived not only from military intelligence but from former prisoners themselves. From interviews (‘interrogations’) with returned prisoners, Cyril Cunningham, the Scientific Advisor to AI9 (the military branch responsible for British repatriation) drew up a detailed map of camps and their respective treatment of prisoners. It was through this topography of captivity that he identified those prisoners who were deemed most ‘progressive’ by the CPV and receptive to Communist ideas (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, *Treatment*, 16). Officers formed a small minority of those taken prisoner and after the initial march north the Chinese separated them and senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) from other ranks in an attempt to undermine the traditional military hierarchy. Conditions varied among these camps, although there was widespread malnutrition, poor housing, hygiene problems and disease (S.P. Mackenzie, 70).

The range of life-writing ordered by the Chinese within these camps has hitherto only been interpreted as part of ‘indoctrination’ (S.P. Mackenzie, 38–42). Political consciousness-raising was a

central part of the Chinese 'Lenient Policy', especially in the first year of captivity. The 'Lenient Policy', as it was described to prisoners, was built on the Chinese view that British servicemen were war criminals for their involvement in this war of 'American imperialism', mitigated only by the fact that they were duped by their governments (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, Report of the Advisory Panel, 2). As a result, the Chinese had decided to adopt a 'lenient' approach, educating soldiers in Communism and thereby helping them to realise the folly of their involvement and encouraging them to call on their government to end the war (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, *Treatment*, 1). Political education could also take place outside of the formal lecture setting, particularly when the lecture system was replaced in 1952 with an emphasis on independent study. The CPV were, for example, highly concerned with prisoners' reading material. One prisoner, who had been imprisoned in Germany during the Second World War, imagined that they would be returning to 'Shakespeare, the Bible and how to pass our time as POWs' (Ward). However, the libraries did not stock either of these texts and instead included literature on social conditions, including by Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens and playwright Sean O'Casey (Beckerley; Richards).

Life writing was a central part of this political education and self-renewal. Using South African prison writing, Daniel Roux recently argued that prisons *demand* a narrative: 'to write about the experience of prison is, in a sense, to explain how one ended up there' (255). In Korea, this demand was clearly articulated, not just discursive. Upon capture British prisoners were first asked to fill out autobiographical forms. This presented many new captives with a dilemma, for standard army guidance dictated that servicemen should only give their name, rank and number, but no other autobiographical information. However, many servicemen disclosed more during their incarceration. Based on the evidence given by prisoners of war upon their return, Cyril Cunningham at AI9 identified six principle areas the Chinese questionnaire typically covered. These included: brief self-description, personal and familial financial positions, social relationships, life before joining the forces and military career, social activities and political affiliations and, finally, impressions whilst in captivity (Cunningham, 164–66). In describing these forms, ex-prisoners stressed that whilst some answered all the questions, others only answered the personal questions or gave cautious and even flippant responses (Cunningham, 24–25). It is possible that these claims of flippancy were later exaggerated when speaking to Cunningham, who was tasked with ascertaining former prisoners' loyalties and behaviour in captivity. Nevertheless, this form was a clear attempt to extract a life chronology from prisoners, as well as asking for reflections on military identity and on being a prisoner of war under the Chinese.

More innovative forms of autobiographical questioning indeed demanded a greater autobiographical output. The CPV issued prisoners with diaries to record their daily activities and reflections. These compositional works were intended to complement the political education they were receiving. Accordingly the entry pages of the standard diary produced in 1951 by the CPV for use by prisoners was adorned with sayings such as 'Don't be fodder for the war profiteers', 'This war

is senseless, get together to stop it', and 'British soldiers! Don't risk your lives for the Yankee bosses' (Shaw). The CPV intended diaries to chart an individual's political education and improvement. The discourse of self-improvement is significant here. John Shaw of the Royal Ulster Rifles noted in his weekly diary entries how he was learning to dance, play chess and even improve his grasp of trigonometry under the tutelage of a fellow prisoner (Shaw). Self-improvement was also evident in physical activity; once rations improved, servicemen began to perfect their swimming, boxing and football (Knowles, 6). In many ways therefore these diaries mirror the ameliorative projects of diary writing which had developed in Western autobiographical writing since the Reformation (Lynch, 2). The diary, like education, was a way of improving oneself. Yet these diaries also reflect the disciplinary power of life writing within Chinese culture. Aaron William Moore notes that in the 1930s Japanese captives of Chinese Nationalists had been compelled to keep 'guided diaries' during their imprisonment and indeed since the nineteenth century life writing was seen as a sign of discipline and self-control within the Chinese military (Moore 2007; Moore, 2009, 30). The 'Lenient Policy' itself originated in the civil war in China, where Mao Zedong had used such re-education to increase the number of his own troops (S.P. Mackenzie, 4–5). The Chinese attempt to transfer their life writing traditions to British servicemen also displays a large investment of manpower. To analyse these diaries (or at the very least summaries of discussion groups in English), the CPV had to integrate a large number of English speakers into the camp infrastructure. In Camp Ten (Kangyee) alone, there were fifteen two-person teams of translators and political aides working as part of the political education programme between 1950 and 1951 (S.P. Mackenzie, 25).

The structure of the diaries was profoundly political in nature, particularly in the use of time within both the form and narrative of the diary. Time was an emotive subject for the prisoner of war. John Shaw continually describes the Yalu River in his diary, using its slow change from ice to water as a broader indicator of time, melting away painfully slowly. Due to a shortage of space in the diary, he limited himself to weekly entries and noted that 'In the Next 52 Pages I am Going To Keep A Record of My Life Here in This P.O.W. Camp. I only Hope I shall Not Have to Spend All This Year A P.O.W.' (Shaw). Many British servicemen also used the peace talks to indicate the slow passing of time. The length of these negotiations was further stressed by Chinese lectures on American diplomats' apparently purposeful efforts to extend the war in order to profit from it (Knowles, 3). This temporal awareness is also reflected in a short piece entitled 'A Summer's Day', published by the CPV in book entitled *Thinking Soldiers* a short time after the war, where an anonymous British soldier-narrator guides the reader through the daily life of the prisoner of war. These included sports events and listening to the frequent 'disappointments from Panmunjom' and the Blue Danube Waltz on the PA system, a song whose daily airtime caused great annoyance amongst many prisoners (Beckerley). The story begins with a direct address to the reader, 'why not spend a day with me [...] ... We will make our day a Saturday in August, 1952. Saturday is no particular day; except in a slight variation of games, every summer's day is the same' (Condrón, Corden and Sullivan, 151). The

importance to the prisoner of 'keeping time' amid such monotony was highly apparent. Chinese-issued diaries encouraged this enumeration: one page of the 1953 issued diary included 'Days and Dates' for the year including Christmas Day, Thanksgiving and Easter Day. It also listed key dates in the Korean War so far and the date for 'Korean Armistice' was left internationally blank, with the note 'Fill this in yourself when it comes. You can make it soon by speaking up for peace.' The diary also included blank spaces for key dates such as 'first letter home', 'first battle' and even 'back home (Thank Goodness)' (Chinese People's Volunteers).

The inclusion of these military milestones and a chronology of the Korean War was more than simply a propaganda exercise by the CPV. These diaries suggest captors were aware of how soldiers linked their life writing to another sense of time: to 'history'. In his study of photography of German prisoners of war during the First World War, Harold Mytum argues that earlier photographs often included an indication of the date. By contrast, images from later in the war show 'a certain acceptance of the repetitive camp routines [which] led to a form of timelessness and perhaps also a feeling that ... they were not a part of history but onlookers' (148). Dates became less significant as prisoners became more aware of their own increasingly peripheral status within the conflict; they were less a part of history and more a sideshow to the main action. One memoir written in 1987 by a National Servicemen who was imprisoned in Korea noted that 'the war was over for us now' and that his thoughts often strayed to what was happening at the front (Carter, 41 and 49). The prisoner of war diary thus chimed with the conceptualisation of time within the camp, but it also conflicted with servicemen's desire to be part of a broader, legitimising a notion of time: part of history.

Prisoner of war life writing perhaps differs from other prison writing in this respect. Roux argues that, in the case of South Africa, prisoners have a distinct place in the 'narrative of national time' as the apartheid era was intimately connected with imprisonment (250). By contrast, the prisoner of war camp forms little part in the narrative of war: the prisoner of war is removed from the pivotal events in which he was supposed to play a part. Anthropologist James C. Scott even suggests that the standardisation of measurements underpins the very essence of citizenship: 'codified laws, measures, customs and beliefs' would make all citizens equal, accountable and united (32). Prisoners of war were excluded from this legitimising 'state time' and thus negotiated between two different notions of time in their diaries – the daily timekeeping often gaining precedence over a more grandiose chronology of conflict. The diaries of British prisoners of war reiterate Paul Ricoeur's argument that the narrative and temporal cohesion of 'emplotment', of putting one's life into narrative form, sharpens self-conception (19). Whilst on the surface it would seem that Ricoeur's model is at odds with the enforced narrative, Catriona Mackenzie writes that Ricoeur's 'narratives' are always made in the presence of others and do not imply well-crafted, literary or written life stories (12–16). For example, in contrast to the diaries written by soldiers elsewhere in Korea, the prisoner of war diary tends to end abruptly. Few describe their journey homeward or make concluding notes on the end of their captivity. This perhaps reflects the charged context in which the diary was written;

boredom was replaced by the hubbub of prisoner exchange and debriefing in 1953. Contemplative reflections are restricted to the memoir and indeed, as Philippe Lejeune argues, the diary is a profoundly 'unfinishable' piece of autobiographical writing as there is 'always a time lived beyond the writing' (103). The enforced diary thus prompted the prisoner of war to reconceptualise himself and his role in time and can therefore be used to understand the chronology and temporal dislocations of prison life.

Nevertheless, as with other directed forms of life writing, incidences of subversion are evident. Many diaries were not used the way they were intended. Lieutenant Donald Gallman of the Gloucestershire Regiment used his diary to write down the addresses of American servicemen he had met in the camp and with whom he wished to keep in contact after the war. Military connections and friendships thus countered the political education Gallman had received. It was a common use for the diary. Another former prisoner wrote in a poem entitled 'POW Camp No. 3' of the emotional impact of finding these names many years later in that '[p]recious book in a boot leather cover,/ ... made long ago in a foreign land/ Hand stitched down the jacket's spine' (Anderson in Holroyd, 62). Gallman also jotted down extracts of the poetry he could remember, including William Ernest Henley's 'Invictus', a poem later made world famous when Nelson Mandela also took comfort from it during his captivity and even continued to use the diary after his captivity (Gallman). Despite the Chinese discourse of self-improvement and criticism, prisoners could evade enforced narratives to some extent.

A further element of soldierly life in captivity also undermined the Chinese model of new 'progressive', self-reflexive (and ultimately Communist) soldiers: the persistence of religious sentiment. Religion in the prisoner of war diary is problematic. Cyril Cunningham later argued that the religious prisoner was more resistant to interrogation and persuasion through 'a firm faith in the existence of God and in the efficacy of prayer' (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, Advisory Panel Report, 1). This claim that the qualities which best protect a man in crisis emanate from religion is revealing in several ways. Keith Robbins has argued that Christianity was in decline in the 1950s. The perceived Protestant revival associated with Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953 marked a brief peak in religious sentiment and could not contend with a growing culture of affluence and modernity: even the monarch herself went to the horse races on Whit Sunday (317–320; Green, 271). By contrast, other historians have associated the socially tumultuous years of the 1960s with the 'death of Christian Britain', in comparison with the somewhat staid, if not devout, 1950s (Brown 7; Garnett et al.). But evidence does suggest that religion did form a mainstay in the subjectivity of British servicemen in the Korean War. For example, Colonel Starr (Royal Corps of Signals) estimated that there were over one hundred officers and men attended the Regimental church each week, built by a team lead by Reverend Alan Bowers during the war itself (Bowers).

Yet gauging religiosity in military life writing is complex, for as Callum Brown noted in his controversial study of 'discursive Christianity', church-going statistics do not necessarily show the

breadth or depth of religious sentiment (14). Life narratives complicate this assessment still further. On the whole, those in captivity or peril evoked religious sentiment to a far greater extent in their life narratives. Padre Stanley ‘Sam’ Davies of the Gloucestershire Regiment noted the power of prayer in his captivity in the best-selling *In Spite of Dungeons* and how he and his fellows’ religious commitment angered their captors (Davies, 83–84). Yet religious sentiment was also evident in the soldiery at large. One of the first few pages of his 1951 Manuscript diary Shaw printed an accurate extract from Psalm 23 from the St. James Bible: ‘YEA THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME; THY ROD AND THY STAFF COMFORT ME’ (Shaw). Such a religious frontispiece not only brought comfort to Shaw when he made his weekly entry but could be interpreted as an act of resistance to his CPV guards who could ask to read this diary. However, even quite ‘progressive’ prisoners continually referenced Christian discourse in their captivity. Beckerley remembers reciting the first verse of ‘Abide with Me’ to himself each night on the march northwards, ‘the words being appropriate to the situation I found myself in’ (Beckerley). On balance therefore, religious sentiment arguably constituted an important part of soldierly life in captivity. Whilst this might originate in the close connection between church and military, life narratives demonstrate the widespread recourse to religious language and how it was used to subvert enforced narratives and the model of subjectivity they were intended to develop.

Confession and Interrogation

Whilst many soldiers remained attached to religion during captivity, the Chinese attempted to use ever more public forms of life writing to mould prisoners’ subjectivity. In 1951 the Chinese forced Colonel Carne to write a ‘confession’ detailing his complicity in a subversive ‘sub-committee’ of British prisoners. He was then forced to read it out to other prisoners on the parade ground (United Kingdom, War Office, Special Interrogation Reports). Confessions were often supplemented by additional questionnaires and ‘self-criticisms’ (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, *Treatment*, 3). The soldier was called on to cast aside his former self and to reconstruct himself anew through confession. In this way one might argue that the Chinese used confession in a way we would today label as Foucauldian; in other words, as a subject-forming process (Foucault, *Politics of Truth*, 1997, 179; Chloë Taylor, 9). The confession in the prisoner of war camp acted as a highly prescriptive form of enforced narrative which demanded a new self to be constructed within a particular social context.

The enforced confession potentially destabilises the categories of public and private. Feminist critic Rita Felski argues that confessions straddle the dialectic of intimacy and alienacy, making ‘public that which has been private’ (83 and 89). Yet Jochen Hellbeck shows in his study of diary

writing in Stalinist Russia that this is an artificial and inaccurate dichotomy, particularly within a society consumed with the construction of 'ideal' subjects (5). Hellbeck demonstrates that life writing is not simply the preserve of 'liberal subjects' and that the author of an ego-document (letter, diary or autobiography) understood themselves as 'a particle in a collective movement' (10). Life writing no longer remained in the realm of the 'private'. As seen above, the Chinese issued diaries to aid 'students' in their political education and to challenge their models of soldierly subjectivity. A quintessentially 'private' document in Western imagination thus had a different meaning in the context of the Chinese-run prisoner of war camp. Similarly, Carne's 'confession' was intended to be a profoundly public declaration of wrong-doing. The enforced narrative deepens debates over whether life narratives can ever be interpreted as private, voluntary and 'true'.

Speaking in oral history interviews three decades afterwards, some veterans remembered these 'confessions' in a far more jovial light, recounting how plaintiffs generally produced tongue-in-cheek confessions, much to the amusement of others on the parade (Beckerley). The discontinuation of the confession as part of Chinese policy later in the war implies its inefficacy as a method, but nevertheless one should not discount the full significance and gravity of this form of enforced narrative. Speaking about his own confession, Carne noted later (in a British interrogation) that 'everybody knew the form all right' (United Kingdom, War Office, Special Interrogation Reports). Furthermore veterans' recollections were perhaps influenced by the genre of Second World War prisoner of war films, which frequently depicted the almost debonair wit and humour of prisoners in the stony face of authority. Schoolboy-like cunning and escape stories were caricatured by television programmes and films, from *The Captive Heart* (1946) to *Colditz* (1972–4), and have an enduring influence in the memory of military captivity (Archer, 17; Plain, 170n8). This popular genre might therefore have encouraged these more humorous recollections of 'confession' in the Korean War.

Whilst confessions were typically made by those who had apparently transgressed the rules under the 'Lenient Policy', one-on-one interrogations were far more common. One former soldier recalled that his first interrogator asked him how many pigs and cows he owned, in order to gauge his social status (Richards). Evidence suggests that senior officers were singled out for more interrogations than other ranks. Dennis Lankford, a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve was captured on 28 November 1951 during a mission to an island off the West Coast of Korea. He was kept first at Pyoktong camp, then moved to various locations where he underwent severe interrogation for twenty three months. He describes one incident where he was made to write his life story:

'Write' I was told. 'Write your autobiography to begin with. Write your life story from the age of five through your schooling ... right up to the day of your liberation by the Chinese People's Volunteers.' ... I decided I would not be giving anything away by playing along with them, so I started to write my life [...] There could be no harm in that – it might do some

good ... [but] I was surprised how little I knew of my family history ... and filled out the gaps with guesses and pure fiction. By the time I had finished, dear old father had become a millionaire, who lived in a mansion ... [and] my mother had become an ex-Gaiety girl, who still at times drank champagne out of a slipper (83–84).

Unfortunately Lankford was forced to produce this ‘autobiography’ more than seventeen times during his captivity. In a subsequent interrogation he was punished when he was unable to remember the sensational details of his imagined life (100). Lankford’s text, expertly and humorously written despite the often unbearable conditions of his captivity, is significant in many different ways. First, not only did Lankford’s Chinese interrogators hope to use life writing as a potential source of military information, but they were aware of the psychological dimensions of writing an autobiography, the relationship between prisoner and narrative. The narrative of the self became a battleground; interrogations sought to break down narrative and to use confession to make the prisoner’s voice that of the interrogatory regime (Gready, 494). On the other hand, the prisoner desperately clung to his own chronology, to ground himself in the harshest of circumstances.

Such enforced life writing was not necessarily unwelcome. Colonel Carne describes responding to requests for writing as an occupation, a break in the monotony of captivity (United Kingdom, War Office, Special Interrogation Reports). Similarly, Lankford warmed to the auto/biographical writing, describing another time when he was asked to fill out his autobiography:

As usual, I filled in from my imagination the parts I didn’t know. When I finished that I was so comfortable, the atmosphere so pleasant, it was all such a change that I just went on writing. I found a match in my hand. I had just used it to light a cigarette. So now I wrote the life story of a match. I traced it all the way from a forest in Scandinavia, through all sorts of interesting adventures until the moment it curled up and died in a film star’s hand at a New York night club. I got a lot of quiet amusement out of it all. I covered nearly seventy sheets of foolscap paper with my closely packed scribbling (96).

Lankford’s story of a match is not as unusual as it might seem at first. It mirrors the ‘Life Story of a Penny’, a storytelling practice originating in the late eighteenth century, used by adults and children alike into the late-twentieth century (Dahl, 147) and identified by Steedman as one of the most quintessential forms of enforced narrative (‘State-Sponsored Autobiography’, 41–54). It also subtly references the recurring motif of a lit match in Graham Greene’s popular 1935 novel *England Made Me* (republished as *The Shipwrecked* in 1953), demonstrating both the writing conventions and reading habits that prisoners brought with them. Writing life stories became a common activity for Lankford in captivity, perhaps explaining his adeptness and style in this later published memoir. Lankford’s story of match similarly highlights the creativity that flourished in prisoner of war camps

(Carr and Mytum, 1). Furthermore, Lankford's paean to the match, itself a luxury, demonstrates that he, as a high-ranking prisoner, was not short of paper on which to write down his thoughts: elsewhere Padre Davies had to use lavatory paper to write his private notes which later formed the basis for his book ('Obituary'). Whilst the aim of the interrogation was not to elicit such creative endeavours, the prisoner of war camp provided the time and space, both real and imagined, to pursue such projects.

Enforced Narratives of Returning British Prisoners of War

The much-awaited end of captivity did not hail the end of enforced life narratives for British servicemen. The repatriation of British and Commonwealth prisoners took place following the cessation of hostilities as agreed by Korean Armistice Agreement at Panmunjom on 27 July 1953, an uneasy peace which did not mark an end of conflict on the peninsula. Prisoner exchange took place at two intervals: a few progressive prisoners were released in early 1953 in Operation Little Switch and the majority were returned in Operation Big Switch in July 1953. Former prisoners recount hearing of the news from their CPV guards and were later taken by truck to either Panmunjom or Kaesong where they were then handed over to UN authorities and then to British authorities led by Major A.N. West-Watson at AI9 over a number of days (Bruford-Davies).

Although beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that the figure of the returning prisoner of war had political and cultural consequences which reveal deeper uncertainties over selfhood and agency in the early Cold War period. At first glance, the prisoner of war was a returned hero who represented the perseverance of the British military under periods of strain. The depiction of the return of Colonel Carne and the other 'Glorious Gloucesters' reflects this. Carne's reticence was put down to the British disinclination to gloat about oneself and he was described by the *Illustrated London News* as 'An Inspiration to his Men in Battle and Captivity' (Anonymous).

Yet the process of repatriation itself reflects both the liminal position of the prisoner of war and a further instance of enforced life narratives. Former prisoners were interviewed to obtain military information but also to ascertain their political loyalty during captivity. Based on these interrogations the AI9 team produced detailed reports on British prisoners of war in Korea, including classifications of political allegiances of returned prisoners of war. Those who had been classed as 'progressive' were the subject of particular interest and analysis. The official report into prisoner of war treatment stated that 12 per cent cooperated politically or militarily, 17 per cent did so to a minor degree, 63 per cent neither co-operated nor resisted and the remaining 8 per cent 'resisted in all possible ways'. This advisory committee report noted that: 'Almost every man has his breaking point. This point varies individually and depends on basic personality' (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, Advisory Panel Report, 9). Tellingly, Cunningham used psychoanalytic techniques in his interviews with former prisoners, such as 'projection', asking the interviewee what he expected from their meeting before they began. As sociologist Mike Savage argues, such techniques show the pervasiveness of

psychotherapeutic approaches by the mid-twentieth century (165–166). Indeed the emergence of the ‘interview’ as a research method changed how the state gathered qualitative information about its subjects and how those subjects in turn viewed themselves during the process. The British were therefore equally intent on extracting narratives from prisoners of war using their own enforced narrative techniques. A few British servicemen were even requested to go to Tokyo to give evidence into whether any combatants took part in war crimes (United Kingdom, War Office, Korea War Crimes Division). The soldier was forced yet again to dwell, at least partially, on his life as a soldier.

Repatriation interrogations also have a wider historical significance within the early Cold War. One might compare these British concerns about loyalty to the societal unease in the USA about Communism. There was certainly suspicion over returned prisoners of war in Britain, as many were barred from holding high security clearance in the army even by the late 1960s (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, Radcliffe Recommendation). This fraught political situation was exacerbated by the revelation in 1961 that British spy George Blake had turned ‘double agent’ when imprisoned in Korea. Blake’s forty-two year sentence and subsequent escape from Wormwood Scrubs prison augmented these concerns, as well as feeding popular worries over Communism (‘42 Year Sentence’, 12). British films such as *The Master Plan* (1954), *The Blue Peter* (1954) and *The Ipcress File* (1965) raised the possibility of ‘brainwashing’, a term first used by American journalist Edward Hunter in 1950 to describe the persuasive propaganda techniques used by Chinese Communists (Hunter, 6-7; Carruthers, 245–246). In this context, brainwashing implied an involuntary and immediate change in political beliefs in response to indoctrination. However, Cunningham noted that the press conflated brainwashing with interrogation and he worried that servicemen would presume they had ‘brainwashed’ as so many underwent short interrogations during their captivity (United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, Advisory Panel Report, 16). The Korean War thus also marked a moment of unease about the extracted life narrative and who had the power to bring it forth.

The various pieces of life writing, both written and spoken, created by British prisoners of war indicate the ubiquity of the enforced narrative in mid-twentieth century military experience. Life stories were indeed be ‘fashioned according to requirement, told and sold, alienated and expropriated’ (Steedman, ‘Enforced Narratives’, 36). From the moment of their recruitment, British servicemen were required to provide an account of themselves and both Chinese and British authorities demanded life narratives from prisoners of war. The enforced narratives of prisoners of war are perhaps more visible than those produced elsewhere: as Roux argues, prisons *demand* a narrative. But so arguably does modern society more generally. Sociologist Anthony Giddens argues that autobiography is at the ‘core of modern life’ and that we are all aware that a life narrative is required of us: the ‘reflexive project of the self’ is an integral part of modern society (76, 243; Steedman, ‘Enforced Narratives’, 26). The enforced narrative thus provides an important critical framework through which to volition, agency and selfhood in life narratives, in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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Abbreviations: IWM (Imperial War Museum); NAM (National Army Museum); TNA (The National Archives, UK).

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